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Peacebuilding and sustaining peace

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Letter dated 22 March 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I write to you regarding the serious near-war situation being created in the Korean peninsula due to the ongoing largest-ever joint military exercises being sponsored by the United States.

The United States, in collaboration with south Korea, dared with no hesitation enter into opening the joint military exercises targeted at the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), beginning from 1 March 2017. As already reported, for the joint military exercises to be held until the end of the coming April, massive numbers (hundreds of thousands) of troops are being mobilized, along with all kinds of strategic assets, including a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, nuclear submarines and nuclear strategic bombers.

The United States is not hiding the fact that the purpose of these exercises is to take a nuclear pre-emptive strike against the DPRK for "regime change" based on its "operation plan 4D".

The United States is making claims that it has been holding these joint military exercises for over 40 years on a routine basis. This very fact is strong proof of how long the US nuclear war manoeuvres have been taking place against the DPRK with great intransigence and how much great patience the DPRK has been demonstrating.

We cannot remain an onlooker to the aggressive manoeuvres being committed by the United States and its followers, who are severely threatening the peace and security of the Korean peninsula, the region and the world at large, and therefore, we submitted a letter to the President of the Security Council on 6 March 2017 making a request to hold an emergency meeting to discuss the US-south Korea joint military exercises as an agenda item of the Council.

However, the Security Council is yet again silent, with no response at all.

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The Security Council, while taking issue with the normal military exercises being held by our military in our own land, is persistently turning away from our call for an emergency meeting regarding these aggressive joint military exercises.

This is the extreme end of unfairness and a double standard and shabby prejudice.

The measures being undertaken to strengthen the national military power in our land, waters and airspace are the regular self-defensive ones to safeguard the sovereignty of our country from the continuous nuclear threats and blackmail coming from the United States.

We, and the neighbouring countries as well, are deeply concerned about the aggressive nature and danger of the US-south Korea joint military exercises as ever.

It is the unanimous conclusion of the fair-handed international society that the ongoing largest-ever nuclear war exercises are the root cause pressing the DPRK to the toughest countermoves.

I cordially request you to bring to the attention of the Security Council, in line with Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, the ongoing highly dangerous US-south Korea joint military exercises, which are an obvious threat to international peace and security.

I believe that this is in conformity with not only the requirement of the Charter but also the mission of the Secretariat, which has impartiality and independence as its lifeline.

I look forward to you, who took the oath to be committed to the Charter, positively considering and responding to our sincere appeals.

Furthermore, I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **Ja** Song Nam
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

United Nations S/2017/244

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Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the thirty-seventh submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of Council resolution 2165 (2014), paragraph 5 of Council resolution 2191 (2014), paragraph 5 of Council resolution 2258 (2015) and paragraph 5 of Council resolution 2332 (2016) in which the Council requested me to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on the data available to United Nations agencies on the ground, from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, other Syrian sources and open sources. Data from United Nations agencies on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period from 1 to 28 February 2017.

Box 1
Key points in February 2017

(1) Despite the ceasefire that has been in effect since 30 December 2016, continued fighting in multiple areas around the country resulted in further civilian deaths and injury as well as destruction of civilian infrastructure.

(2) Two inter-agency convoys proceeded in February, reaching 191,500 people. On 5 February, a joint United Nations/International Committee of the Red Cross/ Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy reached Talbisah, and, on 12 February, another such joint convoy reached 107,500 beneficiaries in Rastan. On 20 February, after a convoy destined for Wa'r was forced to turn back, trucks were diverted, aid was taken and drivers were abused.

(3) The situation in eastern Ghouta (Rif Dimashq), where hundreds of thousands of people are being besieged in a number of towns and surrounding rural areas, deteriorated throughout the month amid reports of shelling, air strikes and ground fighting.

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(4) On 23 February, Free Syrian Army fighters, supported by Turkey and fighting under the banner of Operation Euphrates Shield, captured Bab. The fighting to take the city over the past several months displaced some 45,000 people.

(5) Government of Syria forces launched an offensive against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in southern rural Manbij and Khafsah subdistrict. As a result, an estimated 26,000 civilians were displaced in Arimah, Manbij and Khafsah subdistricts.

(6) In Dar'a, a new offensive launched by the Government of Syria on 12 February displaced nearly 18,000 people and forced the humanitarian actors using the Ramtha border crossing point with Jordan to suspend operations.

(7) On 4 February, the Syrian Democratic Forces announced the third phase of the Operation Euphrates Wrath. An estimated 42,000 people have been displaced and civilian infrastructure (particularly bridges) has been destroyed.

II. Major developments

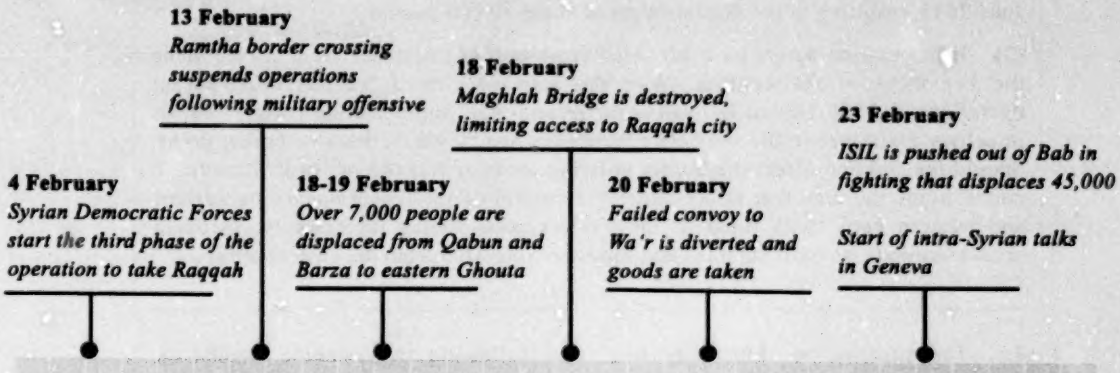
3. The reporting period saw continued military activity across many parts of the country, despite the declared ceasefire. Military operations, in particular against ISIL, continued throughout the month. Alleged attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure were reported, in particular in Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Homs, Idlib, Raqqah and Rif Dimashq.

4. The situation in eastern Ghouta (Rif Dimashq), where hundreds of thousands of people are being besieged in a number of towns and surrounding rural areas, deteriorated throughout the month amid reports of shelling, air strikes and ground fighting. Two civilians died from kidney failure owing to the lack of availability of medical care during the month. A measles outbreak has also been reported.

5. On 4 February, the Government of Syria and the Russian Federation announced that a corridor was being opened for civilians who wanted to leave the besieged area. The corridor is unilateral and has reportedly not yet been used by civilians.

6. At the same time, civilian access into and out of the neighbouring, hard-to-reach locations of Qabun and Barza became further restricted. The situation in those towns became increasingly tense amid ongoing attacks, which resulted in the displacement of over 7,000 people through informal access points into the besieged enclave of eastern Ghouta on 18 and 19 February. On 25 February, a ground offensive was launched on Qabun and Barza. The offensive made movement into or out of the two towns virtually impossible, including through the informal access points into eastern Ghouta. The fighting and the increasing restrictions on civilian movement heightened concerns about the humanitarian situation for civilians trapped throughout the area.

Figure I
Key dates in February 2017


4 February
Syrian Democratic Forces start the third phase of the operation to take Raqqah
13 February
Ramtha border crossing suspends operations following military offensive
18-19 February
Over 7,000 people are displaced from Qabun and Barza to eastern Ghouta
18 February
Maghlah Bridge is destroyed, limiting access to Raqqah city
20 February
Failed convoy to Wa'r is diverted and goods are taken
23 February
ISIL is pushed out of Bab in fighting that displaces 45,000
Start of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva

7. Fighting in Dar'a, in the south of the country, also increased substantially during February. While there have been regular clashes throughout the conflict (see box 2), on 12 February new fighting between the Government and non-State armed opposition groups displaced nearly 18,000 people to the plains near the Jordanian border and towns in eastern and western rural Dar'a. In addition, on 19 February, the ISIL-affiliated Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid launched an attack against opposition forces, causing further suffering. As a result of insecurity in the area, the humanitarian actors using the Ramtha border crossing point with Jordan temporarily suspended their operations from 13 February through the end of the month. The fighting also resulted in the destruction of a majority of the field hospitals in western and eastern rural Dar'a. Only critical cases are now being treated. Water and electrical facilities have also been destroyed in the area, and schools have temporarily ceased operations owing to the increased hostilities.

Box 2
Dar'a

(1) Dar'a is a rural governorate divided into three administrative districts (Sanamayn, Dar'a, and Izra'), with a total estimated population of 889,410, including approximately 217,000 internally displaced persons from other parts of the country. The governorate is a strategic transit point between the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan. Its main border crossing point, Nasib-Jaber has been closed since April 2015, at a significant economic cost to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as to Jordan and Lebanon, countries that had previously had a significant volume of trade pass through the crossing point.

(2) Bordering the Golan Heights, Dar'a was traditionally one of the more militarized regions in the Syrian Arab Republic. As the location of the first protests in March 2011 that led to the current conflict, the governorate has experienced heavy fighting over the past six years, with shifting frontlines between non-State armed opposition groups and Government forces, as well as the presence of ISIL. Consequently, while the governorate hosts large numbers of displaced people,

equally large numbers of the residents have been driven from their homes, either to elsewhere within the Syrian Arab Republic or to neighbouring Jordan. The current fighting is only the most recent in Dar'a; a previous major offensive took place in June 2015, resulting in the displacement of some 40,000 people.

(3) Humanitarian actors have provided cross-border assistance from Jordan since the beginning of the conflict. With the start of United Nations cross-border operations in 2014, United Nations agencies and their implementing partners began to deliver assistance to the southern part of the country via the Ramtha border point. Should the fighting affect the border crossing areas of Ramtha or Nasib-Ramtha, it could divide the area that is not under the control of the Government into eastern and western parts, with those in the western parts seeing increasingly restricted access to goods, as most supplies and foods are imported from the eastern areas.

8. The situation in Homs city was tense following twin suicide attacks on 25 February that targeted State and military security branches, killing the head of State security and 42 military personnel. Also on 25 February, military activity against the besieged Wa'r district of Homs city escalated, with reports of 5 killed and more than 100 injured. Attempts by inter-agency convoys to reach Wa'r in February were ultimately unsuccessful (see para. 23 below), and it was not approved as a destination for aid convoys under the March plan.

9. Civilians in the four towns of Fu'ah, Kafraya, Madaya and Zabadani continued to suffer, with three months having passed since the last United Nations humanitarian convoy delivered aid to the towns. Cases of malnutrition were reported in high numbers in Fu'ah and Kafraya, and reportedly up to 40 people may have died since the beginning of 2017. In addition, dozens of people in Madaya reportedly require medical evacuation, including many children. Four people reportedly died in January owing to lack of medical treatment. They could not be evacuated because of the tit-for-tat nature of the Four Towns Agreement. On 15 February, a mother and her unborn child died during labour.

10. After months of fighting ISIL, on 23 February non-State armed opposition groups, supported by Turkey and fighting under the banner of Operation Euphrates Shield, captured Bab city, in Aleppo governorate, 30 kilometres south of the Turkish border. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) received reports that approximately 390 civilians had been killed in the offensive to retake Bab, primarily as the result of air strikes, as well as improvised explosive devices and active ground hostilities in the vicinity. At the same time, Government forces captured Tadef town just south of Bab city. The fighting in the area resulted in the displacement of an estimated 45,000 people. The high contamination of improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordinance remains an issue of concern for potential returnees, as is often the case for areas formerly under ISIL control.

11. Since 25 February, to the east of Bab city, hostilities between different parties to the conflict have intensified. Fighting continues between non-State armed opposition groups under the Operation Euphrates Shield banner and ISIL, and Government forces have launched an offensive against ISIL in southern rural

Manbij and Khafsah subdistricts. As a result, an estimated 26,000 civilians were displaced in Arimah, Manbij and Khafsah subdistricts. Ongoing hostilities between Government forces and ISIL in southern rural Manbij and Khafsah subdistricts have resulted in the displacement of at least an additional 16,200 people. It was reported that another 9,900 had been displaced in Arimah subdistrict owing to hostilities between Operation Euphrates Shield non-State armed opposition groups and ISIL, as well as between Government forces and ISIL.

12. On 4 February, the Syrian Democratic Forces announced the third phase of the Operation Euphrates Wrath, which is aimed at cutting communications between Raqqah city and Dayr al-Zawr and further advancing towards Raqqah. By the end of February, the Syrian Democratic Forces had gained control of most of the villages and towns north of Raqqah, closing in on Raqqah city. Up to 42,000 people have been displaced as a result of the three phases of Operation Euphrates Wrath to date. Most displacements are temporary to nearby communities, with displaced persons intending to return once the security situation has improved.

13. Air strikes also had an impact on civilian infrastructure in various locations around Raqqah city. On 3 February, the new Raqqah Bridge and the old Raqqah Bridge in Raqqah city and the two bridges of Mutqaltah and Abbarah villages were disabled by air strikes. Since then, civilian and commercial traffic in the area has come to a halt. The two bridges were the only link between the northern part of Raqqah (home to an estimated 150,000 people) and the southern part (home to an estimated 50,000 people). Furthermore, on 18 February, the Jazirah region became isolated as a result of an air strike on the previously damaged Maghlah Bridge, some 60 km east of Raqqah city.

14. On 8 February, local authorities at the berm along the Syrian Arab Republic-Jordan border reached an agreement on the formation of a civil camp management, a judicial council and a local police unit. That development followed a series of security incidents, including a car bomb at a market and small-scale clashes between camp residents. In addition, the use of the health clinic set up near the berm continues to grow, with 785 people having been treated since 15 December.

15. Intra-Syrian negotiations commenced in Geneva on 23 February with a welcoming speech by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura. The occasion marked the first time since 2014 that representatives of all invitees sat in one room. In the course of the talks a clear agenda emerged, comprising three baskets of issues derived from resolution 2254 (2015): governance, a schedule and process for constitutional reform, and elections. A fourth basket of issues addressing (within the context of the overall transitional political process) issues related to counter-terrorism and security governance, as well as confidence-building measures, was added to the agenda. Talks are scheduled to continue on 23 March.

Protection

16. The protection of civilians has been consistently identified as a significant area of concern in all governorates across the Syrian Arab Republic, with some 13.5 million people in need of protection and assistance. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including against medical personnel and facilities, as well as against schools, educational staff and school children,

continued to be reported in February. Threats from explosive ordnance, threats against women and the most vulnerable civilians, such as children, the elderly or the disabled, as well as other violations and human rights abuses, were also reported.

17. OHCHR, reported that the killing of civilians and other abuses and violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law continued throughout the reporting period. Violence occurred in Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Homs, Idlib, Raqqah and Rif Dimashq governorates. Table 1 provides a list of reported civilian casualties recorded by OHCHR. OHCHR documented alleged incidents by all parties to the conflict, including Government forces and their allies, non-State armed opposition groups and Security Council-designated terrorist groups.

Table 1
Reported attacks against civilians in February 2017[a]

Date	*Location*	*Type of attack*	*Number of people killed, including women and children*	*Number of people injured*	*Infrastructure or site type*
Aleppo governorate					
1 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	1	9	–
2 February	Bza'	Gunshot	1	–	–
8 February	Hamdaniyah (Aleppo city)	Ground strike	3	6	Syrian Arab Red Crescent facility
8 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	At least 22, including 6 children	At least 30	–
10 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	5	–	–
10 February	Bab	Improvised explosive device	2	–	–
12 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	At least 7	–	–
13 February	Bab	Air strikes	19, including 5 women	–	Residential
14 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	5, including 3 children	–	–
14 February	Bab	Improvised explosive device	7	–	–
16 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	19, including 6 women and 2 children	–	–
16 February	Tall Botnan	Improvised explosive device	3, including 1 woman and 1 child	–	–

Date	*Location*	*Type of attack*	*Number of people killed, including women and children*	*Number of people injured*	*Infrastructure or site type*
17 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	4, including 1 woman	–	–
20 February	Bab	Air and ground strikes	12, including 4 women and 5 children	–	–
20 February	Bab	Improvised explosive device	1	–	–
24 February	Susiyan	Improvised explosive device	86 people	At least 125	Checkpoint
24-25 February	Bab, Bza' and Abu al-Zandayn	Improvised explosive device	14	At least 7	–
24 February	Maskana	Air strike	–	1	Hospital
25 February	Ashini	Air strike	4 women	–	–
Dar'a governorate					
11 February	Dar'a al-Balad	Gunshot	1	–	Residential
12 February	Dar'a al-Balad	Ground strike	1 child	–	Residential
12 February	Sahhari	Ground strike	1 child	–	Residential
12 February	Muzayrib	Ground strike	2, including 1 child	–	–
12 February	Sahhari	Ground strike	1	–	Residential
13 February	Tariq al-Sadd	Air strike	7, including a woman and 4 children		Residential and hospital
14 February	Dar'a al-Balad	Ground strike	4, including 3 women and a child	–	Residential
15 February	Saydah	Air strike	2 women	–	–
17 February	Umm al-Mayadhin	Air strike	4	–	–
19 February	Nasib	Air strike	4, including 1 woman and 2 children	–	Hospital
23 February	Jizah	Air strike	1 woman and 1 child	–	–
23 February	Busra al-Sham	Air strike	4, including 1 woman and 1 child	–	–
28 February	Muzayrib	Air strike	1	–	–

Date	*Location*	*Type of attack*	*Number of people killed, including women and children*	*Number of people injured*	*Infrastructure or site type*
Homs governorate					
7 February	Wa'r	Ground strike	8, including 4 children	–	Residential
8 February	Wa'r	Air and ground strikes	6, including 1 woman and 1 child	25, including 7 women and 6 children	Residential
10 February	Wa'r	Air and ground strikes	6	–	–
11 February	Wa'r	Air and ground strikes	19, including 1 woman and 6 children	80, including 21 children	Residential
17 February	Wa'r	Air and ground strikes	2, including 1 child	7	Residential
25 February	Wa'r	Air and ground strikes	4, including 1 child	–	Residential
26 February	Wa'r	Air and ground strikes	3	–	Residential
28 February	Wa'r	Air and ground strikes	3	15	–
Idlib governorate					
1 February	Idlib city	Air strike	2	–	Syrian Arab Red Crescent facility
7 February	Idlib city	Air strikes	30, including 11 women and 16 children	At least 40	Residential
16 February	Hubayt	Air strikes	1 woman and 1 child	4, including 2 children	–
21 February	Ma'arratmisrin	Air strikes	5, including 3 women	–	–
22 February	Habit	Air strike	2, including 1 woman	–	Residential
23 February	Jisr al-Shughur	Air strike	1	5	–
25 February	Ariha	Air strike	15, including 4 children	At least 50	Residential and market
25 February	Khan Shaykun	Air strike	4, including 2 children	–	–
27 February	Ariha	Air strike	At least 11, including 3 women	3	Residential

Date	*Location*	*Type of attack*	*Number of people killed, including women and children*	*Number of people injured*	*Infrastructure or site type*
Raqqah governorate					
1 February	Raqqah countryside	Improvised explosive device	4, including 1 woman and 2 children	–	..
1 February	Raqqah city	Amputation	–	1	–
6 February	Mutqaltah	Gun shot	–	3	–
8 February	Ayn Isa	Improvised explosive device	3, including 1 child	–	City outskirts
8 February	Abbarah	Improvised explosive device	5, including 4 women and 1 child	–	–
21 February	Ma'dan	Air strike	11	–	–

Source: OHCHR.

[a] In line with resolution 2258 (2015), the present description of developments on the ground relates to the compliance with resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) by all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. The information is provided without prejudice to the work of the Task Force on the Cessation of Hostilities of the International Syria Support Group. The list is not exhaustive.

18. The Department of Defense of the United States of America publicly confirmed that in February the international coalition to counter ISIL carried out 549 strikes against ISIL targets in the governorates of Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah, Homs, Idlib and Raqqah. The Department of Defense publicly confirmed that 286 strikes were launched in and around Raqqah in February. The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation held a press briefing on 3 March, in which it stated that Russian Aerospace Forces continued to support Syrian Government troops in combat operations against ISIL and the Nusra Front. The Ministry noted that Russian Aerospace Forces carried out 991 "combat sorties" during the previous month, destroying 2,306 "terrorist objects", including control centres and ammunition depots. The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation issued a public statement on an attack against ISIL forces near Mayadin in Dayr al-Zawr on 3 February 2017 and another near Rasm al-Is against the Nusra Front on 28 February. The Ministry also released a video of a strike on an ISIL-held building in Raqqah governorate on 18 February. Turkish media reported that Free Syrian Army fighters supported by Turkish air and ground forces, elements of the international coalition and other partners, continued operations against ISIL as part of Operation Euphrates Shield.

19. Medical facilities continued to be damaged or destroyed as a result of fighting. This is in blatant disregard for the protected status of medical facilities under international humanitarian law and as further articulated by the Security Council in its resolution 2286 (2016). The United Nations and health partners received credible reports of seven attacks against medical facilities in February. Four of the seven were attacks on hospitals, two on ambulances and one on a Syrian Arab Red Crescent centre. All of the facilities that were attacked are reportedly temporarily or

permanently out of service. The attacks included two on hospitals in Hama (temporarily closed), two on hospitals in Dar'a (one permanently and one tempo.arily closed), one on an ambulance in Homs, one on an ambulance in Rif Dimashq and one on a Syrian Arab Red Crescent centre in Idlib (temporarily closed). An additional attack was reported by OHCHR on a hospital in Aleppo governorate (Maskana). Primary, secondary and tertiary health-care services also continued to experience severe gaps in performance and service delivery, owing to the extensive damage caused to health-care facilities, the rapid turnover of health-care staff and the lack of qualified professionals in different specialized medical fields. Paediatric and maternal health-care services, including routine vaccinations, were negatively affected.

20. Educational facilities continued to be subject to a number of attacks during February. Four attacks were reported by the United Nations during the reporting period. On 3 February, three schools located in Idlib city were hit by air strikes, which resulted in severe damage to the schools' facilities. As it was Friday, the schools were closed; therefore, no casualties among students were reported. On 7 February, another school in Idlib city was hit by two rockets, which damaged its windows, doors and outside walls.

Humanitarian access

Box 3
Key points

(1) Two inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach areas proceeded in February. On 5 February, a joint United Nations/International Committee of the Red Cross/Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy reached Talbisah with assistance for 84,000 people in need, as approved under the January plan. On 12 February, another such joint convoy, as approved under the January plan, delivered assistance for 107,500 beneficiaries in Rastan.

(2) Two convoys, to Duma and Wa'r were cleared to deploy, but ultimately unable to deliver, after three unsuccessful attempts each. The reasons included insecurity, late facilitation letters and late approval to load health items. On 20 February, the convoy to Wa'r that was forced to turn back because of insecurity was stopped on its way back to the warehouse, and several trucks filled with humanitarian supplies were diverted by civilians and unknown armed elements to a Government-controlled area.

(3) The March inter-agency convoy plan was submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 15 February. A total of 44 per cent of the requested beneficiaries (348,200 of 787,500) were approved on 28 February: 66,000 were approved in full, and 282,200 were approved with conditions. This approval rate is the lowest since March 2016, when the monthly plan process began.

(4) During the reporting period, some 626,525 beneficiaries were assisted with food commodities by the United Nations and its partners via cross-border operations from Turkey and Jordan. Planned cross-border operations to the southern part of the country were affected by fighting between Government forces and non-State armed opposition groups.

21. The delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need remained extremely challenging in many areas of the country as a result of active conflict, shifting conflict lines and deliberate restrictions on the movement of people and goods by the parties to the conflict.

22. Access to the millions of people living in besieged and hard-to-reach locations remained of critical concern. Two inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach areas proceeded in February. On 5 February, a joint United Nations/International Committee of the Red Cross/Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy reached Talbisah with assistance for 84,000 people in need, as approved under the January plan. On 12 February, another such joint convoy, as approved under the January plan, delivered assistance to 107,500 beneficiaries in Rastan. Both convoys were delayed for reasons that included late receipt of facilitation letters, loading delays at the warehouse and delays owing to the security situation. Furthermore, medicine and nutrition supplies could not be included in the convoys owing to a lack of approvals.

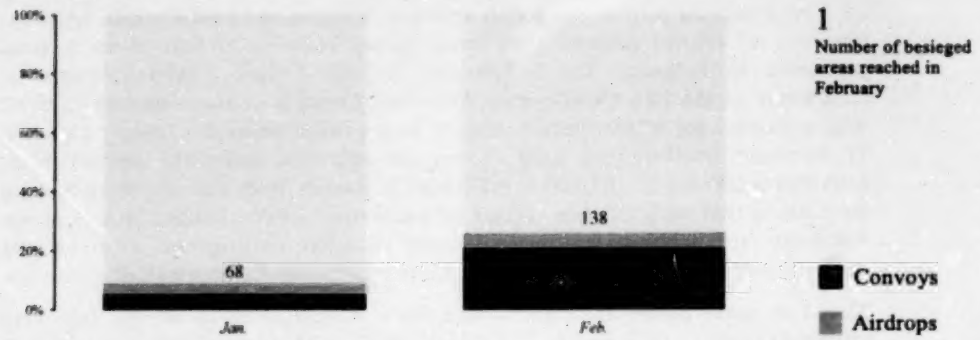
23. Two other convoys, to Duma and Wa'r were cleared to deploy, but were ultimately unable to deliver. On 19 February, the loaded convoy for Wa'r was forced to turn around owing to the security situation on the ground, including an incident in which a person was shot and injured by a sniper. On 20 February, prior to reaching Wa'r, the loaded convoy was unable to proceed because of ongoing shelling and sporadic fire. On their way back to the warehouse, several trucks filled with humanitarian supplies were diverted by civilians and unknown armed elements to a Government-controlled area. The drivers and trucks were temporarily detained, and some drivers were reportedly mistreated, but the trucks and drivers were subsequently released, albeit without the humanitarian supplies.

24. During the reporting period, United Nations agencies also undertook single-agency deliveries to cross-line and hard-to-reach locations, or reached those locations through their regular programmes. Moreover, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continued to provide medical, education and protection services, as well as some support in other sectors, in hard-to-reach locations, under extremely challenging circumstances.

Figure II

United Nations inter-agency cross-line humanitarian operations: number and percentage of people reached each month in besieged areas, including via airdrop to Dayr al-Zawr city

(Thousands of people)



25. Deliberate interference and restrictions by the parties to the conflict continued to prevent aid delivery. The majority of United Nations agencies and partners continued to be unable to access populations in need in ISIL-controlled areas of the country. All plans to deliver assistance to those areas have been suspended owing to the inability to work independently and monitor activities. WFP has therefore been unable to reach Raqqah and most of Dayr al-Zawr governorates, as well as pockets of northern rural Aleppo, southern rural Hasakah, north-western rural Hama and eastern rural Homs. Moreover, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has remained unable to return to Yalda/Yarmouk since 25 May 2016, owing to security concerns on the ground.

26. Humanitarian operations were affected in Dar'a governorate during February by ongoing fighting between the Government and non-State armed opposition groups (see para. 7 above) that resulted in the suspension of humanitarian operations at Ramtha border crossing point from 13 February to the end of the reporting period.

Table 2
United Nations inter-agency cross-line humanitarian operations (February 2017)

302,873 people reached

People reached in hard-to-reach areas 231,000	People reached in besieged areas 71,873	People reached in priority cross-line areas 0
5.7 % People reached in hard-to-reach areas	11.2 % People reached in besieged areas	1 of 13 Besieged locations reached
Cross-line convoys 3	Airlifts 97	Airdrops 29

27. Life-saving medicines and medical supplies, such as serum drugs, renewable items (razors, scalpel blades, gauze) and surgical equipment (forceps, scissors, needles), continued to be consistently removed by security bodies from midwifery kits, inter-agency emergency health kits, resuscitation kits, paediatric kits and diarrheal disease sets in inter- and single-agency convoys. The removal of such items reduces the effectiveness of medical assistance, which impacts people in need. Life-saving and life-sustaining medical items sufficient for 4,838 treatments were removed from the convoys to Talbisah and Rastan in February. The treatments and supplies that were removed are shown in table 3. In addition, some medical supplies could not be delivered because convoys under the monthly inter-agency convoy plan could not proceed. Furthermore, since the beginning of 2017, WHO has been requesting the Government for access to two locations in rural Damascus. The request remains unanswered.

Table 3
Medical supplies removed from humanitarian convoys in February 2017

Location	*Number of treatments*	*Type of supplies*
Talbisah	2 300	Pneumonia kits A and B and antibiotics in the form of tablets were reduced in quantities. Some medical items and consumables were removed from the diarrheal, midwifery, resuscitation and inter-agency emergency health kits.
Rastan	2 538	Pneumonia kits A and B and antibiotics in the form of tablets were reduced in quantities. Some medical items and consumables were removed from the diarrheal, midwifery, resuscitation and inter-agency emergency health kits. In addition, anti-angina and basic medical supplies were reduced in quantity.

28. The United Nations inter-agency convoy plan for February included requests to access 20 locations, including besieged locations, aiming to reach 675,250 people. In their response on 1 February, the Syrian authorities approved full or partial access to 518,700 of the requested beneficiaries (76.8 per cent). For the remaining 156,550 beneficiaries (23.2 per cent) requested under the plan access was denied or they were not included in the approved beneficiaries.

29. On 15 February, the United Nations submitted the inter-agency convoy plan for March. The plan requested access to 787,500 people in need across 21 besieged and hard-to-reach locations. On 28 February, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic transmitted the High Relief Committee's approvals for the March inter-agency convoy plan. Access was approved for a total of 44 per cent of the requested beneficiaries (348,200); full access was approved for 66,000 and access with conditions was approved for 282,200. Of the 21 requested areas, 5 were approved in full (24 per cent), 8 were approved with a lower number of beneficiaries (38 per cent) and 8 were denied (38 per cent). This approval rate is the lowest since March 2016, when the monthly plan process began. In comparison, in January and February, 76 per cent and 77 per cent of requested beneficiaries were approved, respectively.

30. The Nusaybin-Qamishli crossing in Hasakah governorate has been temporarily closed by the Turkish authorities since 27 December 2015 because of security concerns. Hasakah governorate also remains largely inaccessible by road for United Nations agencies from within the Syrian Arab Republic owing to insecurity and the presence of ISIL along the routes. The United Nations continues with airlifts from Damascus to Qamishli airport to deliver multisectoral assistance (see para. 34).

Humanitarian response

31. In February, United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need through all modalities from within the Syrian Arab Republic and across borders (see table 4). In addition to the United Nations and partners, NGOs continued to deliver valuable assistance to people in need, as in previous months. The Government continued to provide basic services to those areas under its control as well as in many areas beyond its control.

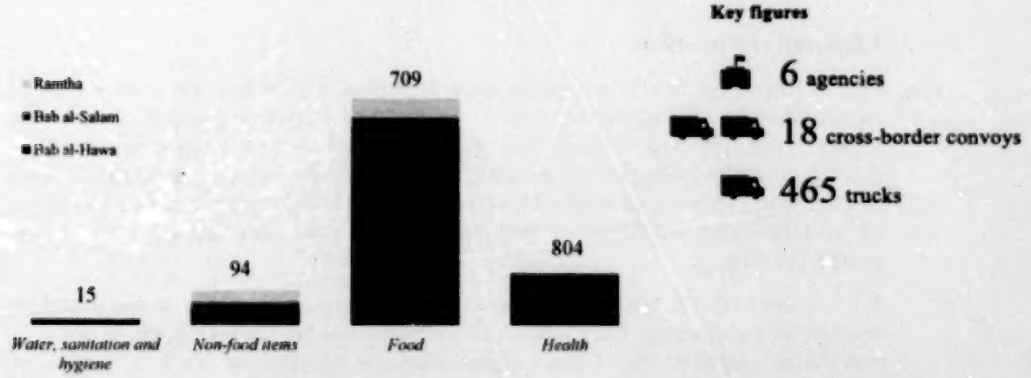
Table 4
Number of people reached by United Nations organizations, February 2017

Organization	*Number of people reached*
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	23 226
International Organization for Migration	90 337
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	333 444
United Nations Children's Fund	1 300 000
United Nations Development Programme	1 756 097
United Nations Population Fund	199 950
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	430 000
World Food Programme	3 542 070
World Health Organization	2 648 507

32. During the reporting period, cross-border deliveries continued from Turkey and Jordan into the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (see figure III). In accordance with those resolutions, the United Nations provided the Syrian authorities with advance notice of each shipment, including its content, destination and number of beneficiaries. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations, monitoring 465 trucks used in 18 convoys in February, confirming the humanitarian nature of each and notifying the Syrian authorities after each shipment. The Mechanism continued to benefit from excellent cooperation with the Governments of Jordan and Turkey.

Figure III
Number of beneficiaries assisted by the United Nations and its partners, by cluster, through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, February 2017

(Thousands)



33. The inter-agency convoys to the hard-to-reach locations of Talbisah and Rastan listed in table 5 were completed on 5 and 12 February, respectively. Moreover, during February, the World Food Programme (WFP) completed 17 airdrop rotations to besieged Dayr al-Zawr city, delivering sufficient quantities for 46,225 people to receive full food rations. As at 28 February, 197 airdrop rotations had been conducted since the start of the operation in April 2016, amounting to a total of 3,706 tons of WFP mixed food commodities, fortified date bars, salt and yeast, as well as supplies on behalf of other humanitarian actors, in support of all 93,500 people in need. As at 28 February 2017, 345 airlift rotations to Qamishli had been completed since July 2016, amounting to a total of 11,797 tons of WFP food and other supplies on behalf of other humanitarian actors. During the month of February, this enabled WFP to provide assistance to 183,000 people in Hasakah governorate, including 3,100 food rations, which was sufficient to assist 15,500 Iraqi refugees from Mosul hosted in Hawl refugee camp.

Table 5
Inter-agency cross-line humanitarian convoys, February 2017

Date	*Location*	*Requested target (number of beneficiaries)*	*Targeted people reached*	*Type of assistance*
5 February	Talbisah	84 000	84 000	Multi-sectoral
12 February	Rastan	107 500	107 500	Multi-sectoral

34. On 18 February, a six-day polio campaign was launched in the northern part of the country, targeting 613,563 children in accessible areas in Idlib, Ladhiqiyah, Aleppo and Hama governorates. Campaigns in Homs governorate followed on 20 February. The total number of children vaccinated as at 28 February was 559,011 (91 per cent of the target).

35. In addition, throughout the month, the Russian Federation sent information bulletins to the United Nations from the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic which outlined the provision of bilateral humanitarian assistance.

Visas and registrations

36. A total of 46 new visa requests were submitted in February. Of those, a total of 26 applications were approved, 2 were rejected and 18 remain pending. A new visa request submitted in previously was rejected in February and10 new visa requests from previous months remain pending. A total of 50 visa renewal requests were submitted in February, of which 33 were approved and 17 remain pending. A further 14 visa renewals submitted in previous months were also approved while two remain pending.

37. A total of 17 international NGOs are registered with the Government to operate in the country. Four additional international NGOs are in the process of completing registration. Those organizations continued to face a series of administrative hurdles and restrictions that affect their ability to operate, including gaining permission to undertake independent needs assessments. Some 216 national

NGOs are authorized to operate in the Syrian Arab Republic, including 6 national NGOs that were added in February.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

38. Since the start of the conflict, dozens of humanitarian workers have been killed, including 21 staff members of the United Nations (of which 17 were UNRWA staff members), 64 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and 8 staff members and volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. In addition, many staff members of international and national NGOs are reported to have been killed.

III. Observations

39. The devastating humanitarian crisis brought on by six years of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to grow in both scope and intensity. Few in the Syrian Arab Republic have been untouched by the ravages of war. A total of 13.5 million people are in need, including 5.8 million children, and another 4.9 million have fled the country. Some 85 per cent of the country lives in poverty. There are 6.3 million internally displaced persons, and many of them have been displaced more than once, as conflict lines have shifted.

40. The response to those most in need, particularly the 643,780 people who are in besieged areas, is challenged from every angle. Security challenges delay deployments, as do administrative and other bureaucratic delays.

41. In January, United Nations humanitarian shipments were temporarily suspended from Bab al-Hawa on the Turkish border owing to fighting in Idlib, and in February, humanitarian shipments through the United Nations-authorized border crossing point with Jordan were also suspended owing to insecurity. Cross-line convoys approved under the monthly plans are not cleared, and those that are allowed to cross have medical items regularly taken off the trucks. Two inter-agency cross-line convoys (to Duma and Wa'r) were unable to deliver assistance, despite the fact that the United Nations had received all clearances and had undertaken all necessary deconfliction with the warring parties. Most significantly, the convoy destined for Wa'r saw humanitarian assistance diverted and humanitarian workers abused. I condemn such acts and remind all actors of their responsibility to ensure that humanitarian assistance can be delivered safely, without hindrance and on a sustained basis to all in need.

42. I welcome the efforts of the conveners of the Astana meetings to establish and maintain the ceasefire that entered into effect on 30 December 2016. The United Nations will continue to build on those efforts in its endeavours to advance the political process. I am concerned, however, at ongoing and seemingly indiscriminate attacks that result in civilian deaths and injuries. All parties to the conflict must respect the multiple and clear obligations that they have to protect civilians. Month after month, my reports continue to highlight the attacks against and destruction of schools, hospitals and other parts of civilian infrastructure. Such attacks and wanton destruction not only cause suffering for civilians in the conflict today, but will also slow any future recovery and negatively impact the lives of Syrians for years to

come. The deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure and the use of starvation as a weapon of war constitute war crimes. I firmly believe that there must be accountability for crimes committed in this long and terrible conflict. I reiterate my previous call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

43. Widespread destruction is particularly painful because it is unnecessary. It has been emphasized countless times that there will be no military solution. Yet military action continues nonetheless, resulting in meaningless death and destruction. The United Nations remains committed to seeking a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict through an inclusive and Syrian-led political transition process based on the Geneva Communiqué and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015). The recent round of talks in Geneva saw some initial progress on an agenda and methodology for substantive talks. I have asked my Special Envoy to continue to seek forward momentum towards a political agreement, and I call on the parties to engage fully in the process to work to end this war at long last.